



CHILD ABUSE—AN INVISIBLE CRIME IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Children have the right to protection from all forms of violence, abuse and maltreatment. They have the right to live in safety and dignity in a protective and nurturing environment, both at home and in the community. But they are horribly mistreated everyday by adults who are meant to love and care for them. Two out of every three children are abused every day according to Ministry of Women and Child Development Report, 2007. Child Abuse is the misuse of power by adults over children that endangers or impairs a child's physical or emotional health and development. There are three major categories of child abuse—Physical, Emotional and Sexual. Review of related literature revealed that the children who have experienced physical punishment tend to be more aggressive towards parents, siblings, peers and later spouse and are more likely to develop anti-social behaviours. Child abuse is violation of the Right to life with dignity. It is an invisible crime as it tends to occur behind closed doors and most of the children do not report the matter to anyone out of fear and shame. If a child is being abused in home, teachers should be supportive of the child and in a position to look for remedies rather than blaming the parents. As the citizen of this country we must all campaign publicly against all forms of violence against children and make Children and their Mother aware of their Rights.

KEY WORDS: Child Abuse, Invisible, Neglect, Physical Abuse, Rights, Sexual Abuse.

INTRODUCTION

India is home to the largest number of children in the world. More than, one-third of the country's population is made of children below eighteen years of age. The National Policy for Children (NPC) 2013 recognises every person below the age of eighteen years as a child and covers all children within the territory and jurisdiction of the country. Children have the right to be protected wherever they are and the state shall create a caring, protective and safe environment for all children. But the present situation in the country is not so.

According to the Report of Ministry of Women and Child Development (MOWCD) 2007, two out of every three children are physically and emotionally abused in India. Child protection has remained largely unaddressed. It is an invisible crime as it tends to occur behind closed doors and most of the children do not report the matter to anyone out of fear and shame. Child abuse in our country is the violation of Right to live in safety and dignity.

Child abuse refers to the harm, or risk of harm, that a child or youth may experience while in the care of a person they trust or depend on, including a parent, sibling, other relative, teacher or guardian. It is the misuse of power by adults over children that endangers or impairs a child's physical or emotional health and development. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has defined 'Child Abuse' as a violation of basic human rights of a child, constituting all forms of physical, emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual harm or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.

Child abuse has many forms: Physical, Emotional and Sexual.

Physical abuse is when a child has been physically harmed due to some interaction or lack of interaction by another person, which could have been prevented by any person in a position of responsibility, trust or power. Children face physical abuse in varied forms such as beating with an external object, punching, slapping, kicking, shaking, hair-pulled, head banged against a wall, throwing a child and so on.

Emotional Abuse can be seen as a failure to provide a supportive environment and primary attachment figure for a child so that they may develop a full and healthy range of emotional abilities. It is the neglect or maltreatment of children. Technically emotional abuse is any behaviour that obstructs emotional growth of a child like constant criticism, insult, and rejection, negative teasing, locking in a room, shouting at, and comparing with others.

Child Sexual Abuse is any sexual act or sexual threat imposed upon a child. Sexual abuse can include: exposure, indecent phone calls, fondling, persistent intrusion of a child's privacy, penetration, rape, incest, involvement with pornography, child prostitution. Secrecy, misuse of power and the distortion of adult-child relationships are key factors in the sexual abuse of children. Most abusive behaviour is perpetrated by someone the child knows and trusts (a parent, step-parent, relative, family friends or care givers). Only a small proportion of child sexual abuse is by a stranger.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Review of related literature revealed that the children who have experienced physical punishment tend to be more aggressive towards parents, siblings, peers and later spouse and are more likely to develop anti-social behaviour (Durrant 2004, Ohene 2006, Dobbs 2005, Straus 1999). The National Commission for protection of Child Rights (2009) observed that 99.86 percent of children had experienced physical abuse, Emotional abuse and Neglect. A Government of India, Ministry of Women and Child Development (2007) survey showed that the prevalence of all forms of child abuse is extremely high (physical abuse 66%, emotional abuse 50% and sexual abuse 50%). A research study was conducted in West Bengal in the year 2005, Titled—Abuse among child domestic workers. The findings indicate that the children who were working as child domestic workers in urban areas were abused physically, emotionally and sexually.

Child Abuse is a major problem in our country. The National Policy for Children (2013) recognised children to be a 'national assets' and accorded 'paramount importance' to their best interests in all situations of dispute. In its Preamble it says that all children have the Right to grow in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. But there is a rising trend of crime against children in our country. Eight cases of sex crimes against children have been registered every day. About 6,816 police cases were registered from November 2012—when the Protection of Children against Sexual offence Act (POCSO) came into force up to March, 2015. The highest number of FIR has been registered in Rajasthan followed by Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Kerala according to data available with the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR). The number of convictions is only 166 i.e. 2.4% of the total cases registered while in 389 cases accused were acquitted. The average age of sexual abuse victims in the country has been estimated to be around nine years. In most of the cases people in positions of trust and authority are major abusers (The Times of India, 9th July 2015, 17:29A.M IST).

INSTANCES OF CHILD ABUSE IN INDIA

- A seven year old girl was allegedly raped by a 35 year old neighbour in north Delhi's Burari area. The accused in the case is a painter by profession and was working temporarily at the office of the girl's father. He was arrested by police and produced before a court, which sent him to 14-day judicial custody (NDTV, June 06, 2016, 17:44 IST)
- A court in Kerala has sentenced a Christian Priest to 40 years in prison for repeatedly raping a 12-year old girl at the Church (NDTV Kerala, March 02, 2016, 16:21 IST).
- A four year old girl was found abandoned at the Sion-Dharavi Hospital Junction, Mumbai. The girl was crying, could barely walk, and looked disoriented. A passerby took the girl to the Dharavi Police Station and an examination at the Sion Hospital revealed she was raped the previous night. Police suspect the involvement of a person known to the family in the crime (The Times of India, Mumbai, Feb 19, 2016, 10:05 AM IST).
- Humanity has been shamed yet again after an octogenarian man of 62 years old has been arrested for allegedly raping a minor girl many times in a

Ghaziabad crèche. The victim used to call the accused Dadu. Police registered a criminal case against the accused under relevant sections of the Indian Penal code and the protection of children from sexual offence (POCSO) Act. [The Times of India, Jan 13th 2016, 12:50 IST].

- A thirteen year old girl of VII standard was allegedly raped by her mother's paramour at his house in Singareni colony (One India, Dec 03 2015, 18:46 IST).
- A child studying in the first grade was punished with 'isolation' in another room of the same school, during which two men, at least one among them reportedly being a teacher in the same school, allegedly sexually abused her. The traumatised child was unable to report the incident to her parent's initially. It was only a few days later, when she complained of physical pain and was medically examined that the incident came to light and the parent's of the child lodged an FIR against Sports and Performing Arts teacher and another unidentified man. [India Today, New Delhi, Aug 4th 2014, 14:43 IST].
- A hearing impaired girl studying in a reputed school for the deaf was molested by the school Principal aged 42 along with a teacher aged 37. The victim had named six other students who had gone through the same horrible ordeal. The Principal under the pretext of giving the students chocolates behave indecently and touch her inappropriately. Both the accused were booked for molestation and under various sections of prevention of children from sexual offences Act. [India Today, New Delhi, Aug 2014, 14:43 IST].
- Ajayrajan, a class I student was gagged with the black board duster and was whipped with a cane by the school teacher for laughing loudly in the class while class XII exams were going on. [IBN Live, Aug 29th 2013.]
- A class VI student of a private school in Karimnagar district committed suicide after constant taunt and punishment from his school warden for not attending his classes. [The Times of India, Hyderabad, July 24th, 2013, 15:30 IST]
- A three year old student was threatened with a pen knife by a teacher. The parents immediately took the child out of the School and despite the counselling session the school conducted, the boy continued to struggle with mental trauma. [The Times of India, July 24th 2013, 15:30 IST]
- An eight year old student died after his head was allegedly banged against the wall by a teacher. The incident happened at the Nirdeshkhali School at Basanti in South 24 parganas, West Bengal. The child was beaten up for throwing bags across the classroom during the class. [IBN Live May 18th 2013, 10:21 A.M. IST]

The above mentioned instances have brought to the light the persisting problem of Child Abuse. These are not the only prevailing instances in our country. Every day there are several cases of child abuse which remain unnoticed and undocumented. Child sexual abuse is common in homes, schools and residential care facilities across India, both boys and girls are at equal risk [ABP Live Nov 13th 2015, 9:16 AM IST]. As a signatory of United Nations convention of Child Rights, India guarantees certain rights to its children. These include the rights to protection from abuse, exploitation and neglect among others. However, activists feel that the country has failed miserably in providing the promised Rights to its children, who account for 40% of its population [The Times of India, April 17th 2015, 3:20 AM IST].

SUGGESTIONS

- Respect the child's dignity;
- Respect the child's developmental needs and quality of life;
- Make sex education compulsory with focus on educating what constitutes abuse to high school students;
- Make schools fully accountable for child safety during school hours, including school travel;
- Start Help lines to report abuse in schools and all major cities where children and Mother can be trained how to use it;
- Social reforms to reinforce the joint family system so that grandparents play a bigger role in children's upbringing, reducing dependency on hired maids;
- Promote shared parenting in children coming from broken homes;
- Create frequent awareness programmes and workshops on Children's Rights in densely populated areas of the city, schools and colleges;
- Strict implementation of Protection of children from Sexual offence Act;

CONCLUSION

Overall, the National Policy for Children 2013 has identified four key priority areas like Survival, Health and Nutrition, Education and Development, Protection and Participation. In its Preamble it says that all children have the right to grow in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding (MOWCD, 2013). So it is the duty of everyone to see that the child is brought up in an atmosphere which is conducive to his or her physical, mental and moral development. In the changing scenario when humanity and humanitarian values are gaining momentum, we have to change our outlook and consider the child to be the most fundamental and important element of the nation. We should work together in accomplishing the objectives of child welfare and development. To put this in the words of Justice Subha Rao "Unless a tender plant is properly nourished it has little chance to grow up into a strong useful tree."

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